



(U) Thoughts on Dealing With Our SIGINT Customers

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An intern's impressions and opinions regarding NSA's customer support. (U)

(U//FOUO) My name is [REDACTED] I am an IA intern in the middle of my fourth tour, and I'd like to relate some of my experiences doing "mini-tours" assisting NSA liaisons to non-military customers in Washington, D.C. I did this because I wanted to better understand how NSA serves its customers, and I've learned a great deal about customer service in general.

(U) Since these customers usually can't "pull" this intel from us, we must push it to them, and our customer liaisons make the decisions on what to push to whom. My job was to help out and fill in when the regular customer liaisons couldn't be there. An example from one mini-tour follows.

The Nature of the Job (U)

(U//FOUO) That's not easy; there are long hours, busy meeting schedules, and feverish attempts to keep timely intel flowing to the customer. You have to be diligent about asking for feedback from customers who might not otherwise be liberal with it, and aware of schedules and priorities to send back to the Target Offices of Primary Interest (TOPI) at NSA to help shape reporting to the customer need. Here are some main job features:

- (U) The work is fast-paced, and requires persistent contact. Because of the fluid demands of the policymakers schedule, meetings can be cancelled or rescheduled on a moment's notice.
- (U//FOUO) The work can be front-loaded. It helps to come early in order to have the day's SIGINT ready to go out before business hours. Then again, many of the best times for meetings with busy customers tend to occur between 1700 and 1800. (Hence the long hours.)
- (U) The job requires personal interaction; friendliness and inquisitiveness are a must to get the feedback that is the life-blood of NSA. The greatest thing you can achieve as a liaison is to garner feedback that changes how NSA reports.
- (U//FOUO) The work is necessarily a bit disorganized. Digital presentation (which the permanent liaison has asked for in the form of 'e-tablets' -- see [related article](#)) would improve delivery greatly, but for now reporting at this location is printed, addressed, and feedback recorded on paper, and can be hard to keep up with.

Lessons Learned (U)

(U) This mini-tour allowed me to think about the uses of our reporting in ways I never had before -- just watching a customer actually read intel is an experience every intern and analyst should have. The customer concept is seemingly underappreciated at NSA, and there may be areas where we fall short on "putting the customer first."

- (U//FOUO) First, the familiar refrain of **understaffing** applies -- the difference here is that adding even one full-time person to the staff (of one), even an intern, would go so far to solve the problem that it should be reasonable even in an agency that is as widely understaffed as NSA.
- (U) Second, the main challenge of this post is organizational, which doesn't have to be

the case. Our paper distribution leaves us with stacks of paper with several addressees. Multiple addressees mean ever-shifting stacks. A bit of **technology** here could make for big efficiency gains.

- (S) Third, **our presentation needs work**. The format, not just the distribution, of our reports is too archaic for the information age. Our intelligence is often more important to the customer than that of other agencies because of its tactical nature, yet it is not as easy to read or understand. Our reports are avidly read, but our customer can take twenty minutes to read a report that, with use of white space and information-mapping, might take five. NSA's production tools need an overhaul to get to that level of quality, but customer satisfaction should be all the motivation we need to get that job done.

(U//FOUO) Customer support can be considered unglamorous work at NSA, since it doesn't put out "product." That kind of thinking is akin to old Communist Party bosses, more concerned with how many nails their factories produce than their use. But I can assure you our customer liaisons are crucial to the Agency's intelligence mission. If people don't read our reports, the right reports, at the right time, the volume of "product" is irrelevant. So while you may not think you'll "produce" if you take a tour or a rotation in a Customer Relationships office, you will make a positive impact on a crucial and sometimes neglected Agency mission.

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